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Going But Not Well Enough

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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June, 1963

GOING BUT NOT WELL ENOUGH

It is good to be home again, among friends and Montanans. I have come back more to listen than to talk. What you have to say to me is more important than anything I might say to you, if I am going to go on doing the job which you elected me to do.

But your chairman, _____, asked me to talk. He has asked me to bring you up to date on the situation as it looks from Washington.

If I told you all was going well, I would be wrong. But I would not be as wrong as those who tell you that all is going badly. The truth of the matter is that the affairs of the nation are going but they are not going well enough.

The President is not satisfied. First, as a Senator from Montana and second, as the Majority Leader of the Senate, I am not satisfied. And may I say that I hope the Democratic Party and the people of the nation are not satisfied.

We are past the midpoint of the present Administration. When John F. Kennedy came into office, the nation was in a serious recession. Two and a half years later, we have a prosperity of sorts. At least that is what the stock market in Wall Street says. That is what the profit levels and other economic indicators say.

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But these indicators do not tell the whole story. This so-called prosperity does not begin to reflect the full dynamic capabilities of the nation's economy. Furthermore, this so-called prosperity is uneven and uncertain.

I do not think it makes much sense to talk about prosperity when there are millions of men and women in the nation--able and willing to work but without jobs. Nor does it make much sense to talk about it when millions of families have incomes which do not allow anything beyond the barest necessities. Nor does it make much sense to talk about it to men and women whose job opportunities are shrinking more rapidly than new opportunities are being created by automation.

So I say to you, again, the nation's affairs are going but they are not going well enough.

These problems of an uncertain and uneven prosperity have been with us, as you know, for a long time. The previous Administration was aware of them no less than this Administration. But there is a difference. The difference is that this Administration is prepared to face the problems and to try to do something about them. We have raised minimum wage rates and extended unemployment benefits and made available surplus food which, before, was supplied to people in need abroad but not to our own needy. We have funnelled new business activity into depressed areas. We have begun job retraining for workers displaced by automation. We have accelerated public works.

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And we have tried to do something about the problems of agricultural surpluses and farm income. It is true that just recently wheat farmers divided about fifty-fifty in rejecting a proposal of the Administration for a new program for that crop. That was their right and privilege as provided by ~~this Administration and the law~~. I don't mind telling you that the Administration thinks it was the wrong decision, that it will lead, if not this year, the next, to a vast over-supply of wheat and to falling prices which will hit the small farmer the hardest. But the wheat farmers--at least half of them--thought otherwise and I can assure you that the Administration is not going to stand in the corner and pout. No, it is going to do everything it can to make the farmer's decision work for the benefit of the farmers as well as for the benefit of the nation. I hope the decision is the right one. I hope that the wheat farmers can have high prices without controls and without having to ask the government to put out hundreds of millions of dollars to support those prices artificially. We will just have to wait and see what happens.

Wheat apart, it is a fact that this Administration's other agricultural programs, as in feed grains, have helped to raise farm income and reduce the burden of surpluses on the taxpayers.

In this, as in the industrial aspects of the economy, we have made a beginning. But let no one delude himself, it is only a beginning. The President knows it. I know it. And you know it. We have got a long way to go. The core of the problem still remains the sluggishness, far less than the best performance of this prosperous economy.

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This is where the general tax cut which the President has proposed comes in. He believes that an across the board reduction in taxes, coupled with certain reforms will not only lift the purchasing power of millions of people who are in need of a tax break, but at the same time bring about the elimination of certain inequities and drags in the tax structure. In that way, the President hopes to see much higher levels of economic activity throughout the nation, to the end that there will be created more income, more job opportunities and greatly increased revenues.

The President could be wrong in his tax views. But so, too, could those who insist that he is wrong, even though they sometimes talk as though they were infallible. The health of the economy is of fundamental importance to the nation. Our position in the world as well as our progress at home depends upon it. Therefore, it seems to me reasonable, after the debate is over, to give the benefit of any doubt to any President, whoever he may be and regardless of his party. If his approach is tried and found wanting, the responsibility will be clearly his responsibility. And may I say that President Kennedy is the kind of man who will not shirk the responsibility. Ask those who ridicule and blindly criticize his proposal for a tax cut whether or not they will be equally ready to step forward and take the blame, if a tax cut is not tried--if it is not tried and the nation falls back into another recession or worse.

What applies in terms of the nation's overall economy applies equally in terms of the nation's public and social services. They are going but they are not going well enough.

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Take, for example, the matter of hospital care. Now the federal government has been subsidizing hospitals for years under the Hill-Burton act. Nobody finds fault with that legislation. Nobody calls it socialism. But in spite of this aid which comes from taxpayers like yourselves, the fact remains that hospital costs to patients have been going up and up until, today, they are often beyond the financial reach of ordinary families who do not have hospital insurance.

Now, we have countless numbers of old folks in this country, people who have worked hard all their lives and who are trying to maintain, on small incomes, the independence and dignity to which they are entitled as Americans. What happens to these people if they become seriously ill? Charity? Neglect? Dependency on their children who have their own family burdens? Is that what is wanted? The truth is that there is not a medically advanced country in the world, which does not have an effective system of nationwide hospital insurance to cover, at a minimum, older people in that kind of a predicament and whose doctors, along with patients and the general public do not support it fully. That is true in our good neighbor Canada. It is true in Germany, France, England and Italy. It is true in Japan and in many other nations.

What this Administration is trying to do is neither unprecedented or immoderate. It is not trying to regiment doctors, patients, or the public. It is trying simply to extend the same old age social security system which has done so much to rid this country of the county poor houses, to hospital

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and related care for older citizens. We might well ask ourselves: Is there any person in a position of responsible public leadership, today, who would prefer to drop the present old age social security system and go back to the poor house approach?

Despite the cries of socialism in the early days of Franklin D. Roosevelt's Administration, in the end, the social security system was adopted, and it has served the nation well for more than a quarter of a century. And in the end, we will adopt a dignified system which will guarantee adequate attention to the hospital and related needs of all of our older citizens, which will guarantee them a measure of security against impoverishment, dependency, and hopeless indebtedness by costly illness. It will not be a socialistic system. Nor will it be the no-system of the charity ward. It will be an American system, as earned as the millions of old age social security checks which now go out to our older citizens each month.

As in hospitalization so in education, much remains to be done before we can say that the nation's affairs are going well enough. The times into which we are moving demand, for our young people and from our young people, the highest possible degree of education and training of which they are capable. They will need it for themselves, if they are to live useful and productive and satisfying adult lives. And the nation will need it for stable survival in freedom and for continued progress in the decades ahead. Unless we do more, much more in the way of education than

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we are now doing, millions of boys and girls are not going to get an adequate, let alone a full educational opportunity. They are not going to get it because the basic education plant of the nation where it is not running down is not growing fast enough to accomodate our rapidly increasing school population. And they are not going to get it because the relative supply of qualified teachers is shrinking and the costs of higher education are rising beyond the reach of countless families.

Let us recognize, frankly, that there are complicating factors in this education problem. There are constitutional problems of church-state relations as there long have been and there are problems of federal-state-local relationships. Let us recognize these difficulties but let us also recognize that it is not we, but our children, who will pay for our failure to solve this problem. And in the years ahead, it will also be the nation as a whole which will pay for it.

We have made a start under the present Administration in connection with the improvement and extension of the opportunities for higher education and teacher training and other aspects of the educational problem. But we have got to face the fact that until a lot more that needs doing is done in education, we may say that the affairs of the nation are going but we had better say, too, they are not going well enough.

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I could continue this catalogue of public services which must be adequately strengthened if they are to serve the needs of the nation's people. In the past two years, this Administration and the Congress have given a desperately needed additional assist in many fields. We have done so, for example, in housing, in transportation, in road-building, in pure water supply, in public health, in reclamation, power and recreation. But the needs grow rapidly, with the expansion in population and the growing complexity of our national life. It is not going to be easy to keep up with these needs, let alone stay on top of them. It is going to take both widespread citizen-interest and awareness and an active and dedicated public service at all levels of government--in the states, no less than in the agencies of the federal government, in the localities no less than in the state capitals. And until we are on top of this situation, I repeat: We can say that the affairs of the nation are going but they are not going well enough.

It seems to me, too, that ^{what} we can say about the internal affairs of the nation can also be said of our foreign affairs.

We are, at this time, in the midst of a particularly difficult period in international relations. When I say that, I have in mind, as you have, Cuba in the Caribbean or Viet Nam in Southeast Asia on the other side of the globe, where affairs are not going well and have not gone well for years and where we have had difficulties for years. But I have something else in mind beyond Cuba and beyond Viet Nam.

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We had better face the fact that we are in a new period of world-wide international change which will probably affect our relationships with almost every part of the globe before it is over.

The relations inside the Communist world are undergoing alteration, not only as between the Russians and the Chinese but as between the Russians and the Eastern European nations such as Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Rumania. The Western European nations are in the midst of an economic boom which has reflected itself in changes in their attitude and policies towards us and towards the Communists and the rest of the world. Japan is moving to the economic forefront in the Western Pacific. Despite the Alliance for Progress which was really begun under the former President and pushed vigorously by President Kennedy, there is a great restlessness in Latin America from one end to the other. Africa is at the beginning of a new and uncertain era. The United Nations is in serious trouble, as an institution for promoting stability and peace, partly because of a financial crisis but even more because of conflicts of purpose and, also, apparently, because of the determination of the Communists to destroy the organization since they cannot dominate it.

There are complex defense problems and trade and tariff problems still to be worked out between the Western Europeans, particularly the Common Market countries and ourselves. These have a great significance to all of us, not only because international trade is an important element in the health of our economy--we export, now, at a rate of over \$20 billion a year--but also because we have been able to slow but we have been unable to reverse the gold outflow which has been going on for many years.

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Just this last fall, I visited both Europe and Asia at the request of the President. It was apparent to me then and, I so reported to him and to the Senate, that the worldwide changes now in process were likely to compel us to make significant changes in policy in our own interest. I suggested the need to reduce foreign aid, to make every effort to avoid becoming more deeply involved with money, and even more important, ^{with} American lives in Southeast Asia and Viet Nam, to insist that the prosperous Western Europeans take up more of ^{the cost of} their own defense and of aid to other countries, to the end that those burdens could be reduced on us. And finally, I suggested that we watch for opportunities to encourage the restless Eastern European countries like Poland and Yugoslavia to get out of the Moscow grip.

Now it is alright for anyone who does not have the responsibility to take any single problem of policy whether it be Cuba or Yugoslavia or foreign aid and concentrate the attention of the public on it, as though it were unrelated to anything else in the world. But the President can't afford that luxury. He has got to look at the whole situation. He has got the responsibility. With him, the nation has got to come first and politics second. And it doesn't matter whether the President is Kennedy, Eisenhower, Truman or Roosevelt, ^{all} ~~are~~ men of the highest patriotism. And all have placed the nation's interest first in matters of foreign relations.

When a President is up against the kind of situation which exists in the world, today, when all the pieces are parts of one great overall situation--a nuclear situation in which tens of millions of people in this country and in Russia and elsewhere in the world can be destroyed in a

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matter of hours, he has got to be very sober and very careful about taking a step until he has very clearly in mind where it will lead, not only in the particular situation but throughout the world, not only in the second he takes it but in the hours, days, weeks and years afterwards.

For the rest of us, it seems to me that we have got to give every support we honestly can give to the man who has the overwhelming responsibility, to the President of the United States. And, I repeat, it does not matter whether he is a Republican or a Democrat. He is the President of all of the United States and of all of the people.

There are no absolute guarantees of our national peace and well-being in this world and there can be none. But to the extent that our peace and well-being depend on the wisdom and patience and courage of the President of the United States, the American people have done well to place their trust in John F. Kennedy.

As you know, the cost of doing what needs to be done at home to take care of the needs of our citizens and to safeguard their freedom and peace in the world is not cheap. Local government is expensive. State government is expensive and so is the federal government and in the end, it is the people who pay all these bills through taxes. But it is a fact that federal expenditures have increased less on a percentage basis than state and local expenditures over the last few years.

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When we talk about the immense cost of the federal government, I think we had better recognize what it is we are talking about. It is true that the President's budget request was for \$99 billion. But what is the money for? Defense and Space make up \$59.5 billion of the total. Interest on the public debt and veterans' benefits take out another \$16 billion. Expenditures for agriculture lop off \$5.7 billion more. That leaves 18 billion for everything else, for the many services which the federal government provides for the citizens of the nation--whether it be in road-building, school lunch programs, the park systems, health research, airport construction or whatever.

Let me say that as far as I am concerned no figure in the federal budget is sacrosanct. It is the duty of Congress to keep expenses down. Waste is waste and it is wrong in the federal government no less than in state, local or private finance. It is wrong in the Defense Department no less than in the State Department or the Treasury Department. Time and again after trips abroad I have urged cuts in what seemed to me to be instances of wasteful or unnecessary expenditures. And in this connection, just recently, for example, after a trip to Viet Nam, I was gratified to learn that a \$17 million program has been shifted from the United States to the Vietnamese government.

But I am not deluding myself and I do not think you ought to be deluded on this point. I think we have got to recognize those who talk about massive reductions in the cost of the federal government are talking

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mainly about cutting the margin of the security of the nation against war and Communism--a margin which is provided largely by our defense structure and the Aid program in keeping a measure of stability in parts of Asia, Latin America and elsewhere.

This is not a happy situation, not only because of the great cost, but even more because it hampers us in facing up to a lot of the things that need doing at home. But, for the present, I know of no alternative unless it is war with the loss of countless American lives and billions more in expenditures in Cuba, Viet Nam and half a dozen other places in the world.

We have got to keep working ~~the right way~~ to get a better world situation. We have got to be alert to changes in the world and be prepared to think differently and act differently in policy if it will serve our national interests. But the need is for sober thought not for war whoops. The need is for cautious and courageous action not for charges of the light-headed brigade.

I want to say, finally, that the responsibility for meeting the great public needs of the nation rests not only on the President and the Congress but on the state and local governments. And in the end, it rests on everyone of us as citizens. If we are indifferent to the public problems which confront the nation, we will have government at one or all of these levels which will also be indifferent or worse and all will suffer the consequences. If we divert ourselves with a fragment of the problem, the great challenges to the nation will ~~be~~ *not be* faced.

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Some may urge you, in effect, to take the state out of the nation and the nation out of the world of the 20th century. But the fact is that this state is of this nation and this nation is of this world and this time. We will either go forward together or most assuredly we will go under together. As Americans there can only be one response to that kind of situation. We will get with those problems and stay with them until the needs of the people of the state and nation are met at home and until a stable peace, in freedom, is achieved in the world.